



THE PEOPLES WAY

Construction Progresses on US 93

In this state there is a saying: Montana has two seasons, winter and construction. For The Peoples Way, US 93 from Evaro to Polson, the latter may seem like the predominate season. The good news is that close to half of the scheduled construction is completed or nearing completion in this corridor.

MDT is wrapping up construction on four of the five projects that went under construction this past year. A sixth project, Minesinger Trail to MT 35, has been complete for one year. Two projects are scheduled to be let to contract this year, and the long anticipated Supplemental Environment Impact Statement for the Ninepipe area is expected to be completed sometime this summer.

Contract incentives are encouraging an aggressive construction schedule and contractors chose to work into the winter months to finish projects. As construction finishes, travelers are starting to see some of the reasons this road is being considered among the most context-sensitive highways in the United States.

Motorists are already experiencing safety improvements in the form of turn lanes and passing lanes, as well as wildlife crossings and fencing. Re-vegetation of native plants is starting to flourish along the highway and the first bilingual sign has been installed, acting as the entry sign for Polson. Once the highway is complete, 37 signs will identify place names in English and also in either Salish or Kootenai.

These enhancements are not just about aesthetics but reflect the collective vision of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation (CSKT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The 56.3-mile Peoples Way corridor traverses the Flathead Nation and is the result of some 20 years of negotiations between these three governments.

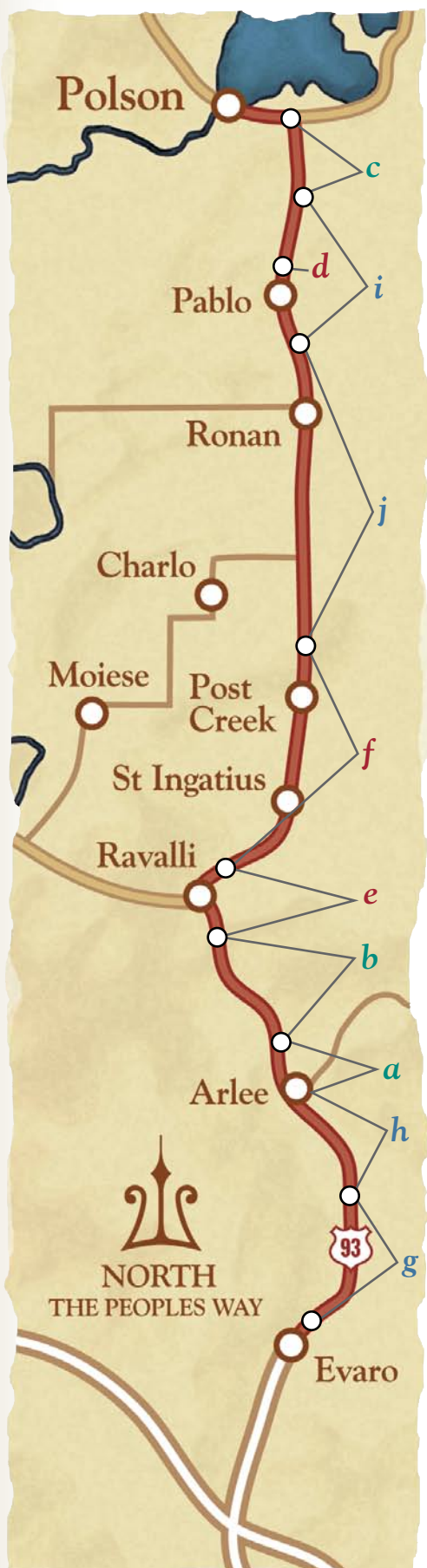


MDT, CSKT and FHWA continue to work together through the construction of this highway and are committed to minimizing inconveniences for travelers through construction and ultimately delivering a safer roadway for all who travel.

Want more information?

For up-to-date information on what's going on with construction and more information on the project, visit **www.thepeoplesway.com**.

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CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

COMPLETED PROJECTS

- a) North end of Arlee to White Coyote Road**
awarded to Frontier West and includes completion of the Jocko River Bridge, two-lane roadway and alternating passing lanes for north and southbound traffic. This project includes three wildlife crossings and significant wetland and riparian work in the Jocko River vicinity.
- b) White Coyote Road to the south end of Ravalli**
a 6.7-mile project was awarded to Riverside Construction. Construction is primarily two-lane roadways with alternating north and southbound passing lanes and 12 wildlife crossings.
- c) Minesinger Trail to MT 35**
includes the Polson wall, overlook, bike and pedestrian trails and four-lane roadway.

CONTINUED PROJECTS

- d) Mud Creek Structures**
a two-phase project awarded to Riverside Construction includes construction of two bridges at Mud Creek. This is the first phase of this two-phase project that began in April of 2006. The second phase will be completed in 2007. The bridges being constructed will also act as wildlife crossings. Contractor is working two shifts with minimal traffic interruption throughout the project.
- e) South of Ravalli to Medicine Tree**
a 4.7-mile project was awarded in April 2006 to MA DeAtley Construction. Construction will primarily be two-lane roadway with alternating passing lanes for north and southbound traffic, improvements of bike and pedestrian trails, along with four wildlife crossings. This project includes a new scenic overlook and future rest area at the top of Ravalli Hill. Contractor is working as efficiently as possible to have this project completed in the summer of 2007.
- f) Medicine Tree to Red Horn Road**
a 5.4-mile project was awarded in April 2006 to Schellinger Construction. This project includes a new bridge over Mission Creek, construction of primarily two-lane roadway with alternating passing lanes for north and southbound traffic, ten wildlife crossings and significant wetland and riparian work. This project is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2007.

FUTURE PROJECTS

- g) Evaro to McClure Road** – Tentative, January 2008
- h) McClure to North end of Arlee** – Tentative, December 2007
- i) Spring Creek Road to Minesinger Trail** – Tentative, July 2007
- j) Ninepipe to Ronan** – SEIS (supplemental Environmental Impact Statement) being finalized.

Wildlife Crossings Enhance The Peoples Way

Driving across the Jocko River Bridge on US 93, near Arlee, may seem like just another newly constructed bridge, but it's not. This open span bridge also acts as one of the many wildlife structures constructed or being constructed along The Peoples Way.

The 56.3-mile stretch of road from Evaro to Polson will include 42 wildlife structures and many miles of wildlife fencing. Upon completion the Peoples Way will be among the most context-sensitive highways in the United States.

Developed by the Montana Department of Transportation, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation, and the Federal Highway Administration, the idea behind The Peoples Way reflects the Spirit of Place, and allows the rebirth of native grasses, plants and shrubs along the corridor; the protection of all wildlife living on the Flathead Nation; and the safety of visitors and residents who pass through the land.

The wildlife crossings and fencing are designed to reduce the number of animal-vehicle collisions and to accommodate natural, safe routes of animal migration over and under the highway for grizzly bear, black bear, white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, coyote, painted turtles, bighorn sheep, amphibians, reptiles, and numerous fish and bird species.

Wildlife crossings vary in size and looks. They can be small round culverts, allowing the passage of riparian animals, to large culverts, bridges and overpasses that accommodate larger species.

"By and large, people don't really notice them, which is what we are going for," said Lewis Yellowrobe, the transportation director for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. "Many drivers don't even know they are passing over or under wildlife crossings."

The most common wildlife crossings on US 93 are arched pipe culverts, an elliptical shaped culvert about 12 feet high and 22 feet wide that is incorporated underneath the roadway.

"We tried to standardize much of the dimensions to make the process less complicated," said Dale Becker of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes wildlife program.

According to Pat Basting, MDT biologist, the CSKT wildlife program deserves most of the credit for making the wildlife projects a go.

"They provided the information for the best locations to put the wildlife crossings," said Basting.

Locations of wildlife crossing structures were founded on local knowledge of wildlife movements on the Flathead Indian Reservation, road kill locations, habitat, land use and ownership, and engineering practicality.

But some questions still remained.

"At the time, we had questions on what types of structures were proper for each area and what type of structure would go where. There was not a lot of research information available at the time," said Basting.

US 93 wildlife crossing projects were developed from wildlife crossing and fencing installations on the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada. To gain further input, MDT, CSKT, and the FHWA looked to Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University to monitor and provide data that would fine tune existing information in March 2002.

WTI conducted pre-construction research from 2002 through 2005 using tracking beds that sampled cross-highway movements primarily of deer and bear before the wildlife crossing and fencing were installed.

According to Amanda Hardy, a research scientist for WTI, it takes time for animals to get used to the wildlife crossing structures and fencing. When animals find themselves facing a wildlife crossing, they can choose one of three scenarios. Animals can either turn around, not using the wildlife crossing; they can follow the fence and cross the

road at the end of the fence line, which allows for potential animal-vehicle collisions; or they can choose to use the wildlife crossing, Hardy said.

In the event an animal makes its way onto the highway and finds itself fenced in, there are a series of jump-outs that allow the animal to escape the highway. These jump-outs are located intermittently along the wildlife fence lines. The jump-outs allow an animal to jump off the highway but not onto the highway.

MDT plans to continue monitoring the effectiveness of wildlife crossings to determine whether animal-vehicle collisions are reduced and wildlife movements are maintained.

According to Becker, in some areas of high deer-vehicle accidents, he believes the numbers of collisions have decreased significantly.

"The reward is we are already seeing a lot of wildlife crossing usage. It looks real promising so far," Becker said.





Ninepipe/Ronan Environmental Review is Nearing Completion

The Montana Department of Transportation, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, intends to improve US Highway 93 in the Ninepipe and Ronan area. The Draft SEIS describing the project was circulated for public comment on August 9, 2006 through October 6, 2006. The proposed improvements will balance the need of bringing the road to current design standards with environmental concerns. For the purposes of describing the project alternatives, the project is divided into a rural segment encompassing the Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, milepost 37.1 to 46, and an urban segment encompassing the City of Ronan, milepost 46 to 48.3.

The SEIS provides a No-Action Alternative and ten widening alternatives for the rural portion of the project. Alternatives range from minor widening of the current two-lane road, to including passing lanes, to expanding the highway to four lanes.

For the urban portion of the project through Ronan, the SEIS analyzes a No-Action Alternative and five action alternatives. These alternatives range from improving the roadway within the existing right-of-way to a split couplet, with northbound lanes on the existing alignment and southbound lanes relocated to 1st Avenue SW.

The preliminary preferred alternative includes a widened two-lane road with passing lanes and several wildlife crossing structures in the rural segment of the project and a split couplet through Ronan in the urban segment.

The public comments gathered during the review process will be taken into consideration in the final SEIS. In the summer of 2007, the FHWA will issue a Record of Decision and the selected alternative will then move forward into design and construction upon availability of funding.

Travel Safety Tips

In order to continue the progress on US 93 from Evaro to Polson, construction may continue throughout the winter months, weather permitting.

- **Plan Ahead** – When making travel plans, research construction zones, winter driving conditions, and allow for extra travel time. Travelers can visit www.mdt.mt.gov for US 93, The Peoples Way construction information and for Statewide Road Conditions, or you can dial 511 or (800) 226-7623 (800) 335-7592 (TTY).
- **Always Follow Signs and Obey Crew Flaggers** – Also, maintain a safe distance between your vehicle, construction crews and equipment.
- **Be Alert** – Not everyone is well versed in construction zone driving etiquette, so pay extra attention to your surroundings while in these areas. Expect the unexpected!
- **Remain Calm and Patient** – Keep up with the flow of traffic and posted speed limits to minimize delays, but never allow speeding and impatient drivers to modify the way you drive. Obey posted speed limits and don't tailgate.
- **Give large Trucks Extra Room** – Because of the length and weight of commercial trucks, they need more room to stop or change lanes, especially in the narrow lanes construction zones often create.
- **Nighttime Construction** – MDT and certain contracting crews are choosing to work through the night in order to complete projects quickly.
 - Take extra precautions when traveling through construction zones at night. Remember to always keep your headlights on, even when your car is stopped.

Nationally, there is one work zone fatality every 8.5 hours and one work zone crash every 13 minutes. That means three people die and 13 others are injured every day due to unsafe driving in work zones.

Remember, construction-zone speed limits apply regardless of the presence of workers, and...

Fines Are Doubled, so Slow Down! Buckle Up! Drive Safe!